NEWS

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Student Pilot Enhances CNET Project
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PENSACOLA Fla.— Ensign Herb Lacy, a student aviator at Training Air Wing FOUR at Naval

Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas, wanted an edge as he began his flight training. With the help of

an "off the shelf" Microsoft Flight Simulator program, and some software add-on's that he

developed - he got one.

Ensign Lacy spent his off duty hours enhancing his flight simulator to give it the look and

feel of a T-34 Mentor training aircraft. He also was able to add in local Corpus Christi landmarks

and visual references. This enabled him to simulate flying a T-34 in Corpus Christi while he was

still attending Aviation Preflight Instruction (API) at NAS Pensacola.

When he arrived at Training Air Wing FOUR his instructors and assistant training officer

saw the potential for training students to fly at their desktops.   At the same time, the Assessment

Division of the Chief of Naval Education and Training had been conducting a pilot training study to

determine the feasibility of using commercially available computer simulator games, such as

Microsoft's Flight Simulator 98 (FS98), as an education tool. This type of desktop simulation could

have a "huge application" to other warfare communities. There are simulation games in production

that can be used for surface and submarine warfare training.

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The student naval aviators at Training Air Wing FOUR will be testing new desktop flight training simulators soon. The Microsoft Flight Simulator has been configured with Ensign Lacy's add-on's to represent the training environment at NAS Corpus Christi, including both the aircraft and physical surroundings. This will allow flight students a chance to familiarize themselves with the flight environment.

An industrial grade version of the simulator is to be delivered in May of this year. NAS Corpus Christi will be implementing a new learning resource center to accommodate the 8 T-34 simulators, and 2 T-44 simulators. The cost for the simulators is approximately $72,000.

The project is being called the MiSSILE (Micro-Simulator Systems for Immersive Learning Environments) project. The study is being conducted by the University of Central Florida's Institute of Simulation and Training to find out how well the new training concept works, and where it can fit into the current flight training syllabus.

According to Cmdr. Mike Kennedy, Deputy Director of the Assessment Division at CNET, the new simulators will not be used as a replacement for actual training flights, but as a tool to make more effective use of flight time. "The students will be able to spend their time in the air learning practical skills, instead of using that time to become oriented with the environment," said Kennedy.

The MiSSILE project began about 20 months ago when CNET looked at how simulation was being used in training. The need was identified for a deployable simulation program. After an investigation of the large fixed based simulators already in use, the question was asked, "what is commercially available?" The answer was desktop simulators developed by software companies. With Ensign Lacy's interest and contributions, the "off the shelf" approach not only makes fiscal sense, but provides a realistic, portable, flight training environment.

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The use of commercially available software marks a change in the procurement process. Instead of the military turning to the commercial sector to ask for a particular product to be designed and built, the military can go "shopping" among the off-the-shelf products, in this case, simulation games. This type of near life-like simulation on a desktop computer has become available only within the last few years. As computer capabilities have increased, so have the demands from the private sector for games that are more realistic. The huge demand from the private sector has pushed the price of these simulation games down, allowing the Navy to step in as just another PC gamer.

The Submarine community is examining the game "688I Hunter/Killer" by Sonalyst. The game, which replicates the Los Angeles class Attack Submarine, gives the submarine community a tool to help develop tactical skills and knowledge. Junior officers are able to play more experienced senior officers to learn valuable skills.

The Naval Surface Forces Atlantic staff is currently working with gaming companies to develop a simulation for use by the surface community.

The goal of all these simulation games is to increase the efficiency of training and maintain higher levels of proficiency. The added benefit is that by using "off the shelf" technology, the Navy will have to not bear the heavy cost of research and development.

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